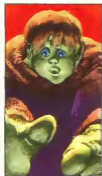


TEN FULL-COLOR SPINE-TINGLING HORROR CLASSICS!

comix international™





OUR COVER
 Monsters Attack. Witches. Demon hordes.
 Past. Present. Future. The outer galaxy.
 And your own back yard. Eleven exciting
 tales of terror. Fantastic full-color art.

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ISSUE NO. THREE CONTENTS 1975

MIND OF THE MASSES A mob
 chased Child. Called him Monster. Tried to
 kill him. No place to hide. 'Til he found
 the witch's hut at the edge of the forest!

CHILDHOOD'S END A star fell.
 And Child found it. It sparkled like a
 piece of heaven. Then it exploded. And the
 creatures inside were set loose on Earth!

THE WIZARD WAGSTAFF Ru-
 mors were rampant in Salem. Strange ani-
 mals stalked beneath the moonlit sky.
 And only the sorcerer could stop them!

AN ANGEL SHY OF HELL Hard
 John Apple liked killing. And he was good
 at it. He'd wiped out Prostitutes, Catlicks
 and Nymphs. Now he'd destroy the world!

HARRY He was a stuffed rabbit. Her fa-
 vorite toy. But her parents threw him in
 the garbage and got his head stained. Then
 her bunny exacted a most terrible revenge!

DEAD RUN Stars faded. And he began
 to run. To the forest. To the shelter of en-
 folding greenery. But there was no escape.
 No hiding from the horror that pursued him!

A WONDERFUL MORNING The
 sun rose on a world with no crime. No pol-
 lution. No war. The children had created
 this paradise. They had slain every adult!

THE PUPPET PLAYERS Gino
 loathed his puppets. But he pulled the
 strings. And they sang for their supper. It
 was a living. Or perhaps a kind of death!

CHESS Dax. A man of action. Forced
 to face a god in a monstrous game of chess.
 The pawns: his family and friends. The
 stakes: high. The prize: their very lives.

MATES Ecdysia. A legendary planet
 populated by women. The fulfillment of all
 desires. But where were the spacers who'd
 gone there? Why had none ever returned?

BLACK AND WHITE VACUUM
 He raced down deserted streets of a ghost
 town. And fell shrieking into star-spangled
 space!

COMIX INTERNATIONAL, NO. 3, PUBLISHED
 QUARTERLY BY WARREN PUBLISHING CO.
 EDITORIAL, SUBSCRIPTION & BUSINESS OF-
 FICES AT 145 EAST 32ND STREET, N.Y. 10016.
 TELEPHONE: 683-6050.

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IT LIES IN THE PINK GLOW OF THE MORNING SUN...THROWING LONG SHADOWS UPON THE HALF-DEAD BLADES OF GRASS. IT IS **DESERTED**, AND ITS SOUND IS THAT OF THE DELICATE NEW ENG LAND BREEZE SINGING A GENTLE LULLABYE.

CHILD

YOU STARE DOWN UPON IT FROM YOUR HILLSIDE PERCH, AND YOU CANNOT **FIGURE OUT** WHAT IT IS. THE MORE YOU STARE AT IT, THE MORE **PUZZLED** YOU BECOME.

YOU DO NOT KNOW THAT ITS STRANGE FORMATIONS, THE LIKE OF WHICH YOU HAVE NEVER SEEN BEFORE, ARE CALLED **HOUSES** AND **STORES**...AND TOGETHER ARE CALLED **TOWN**.

MIND of the MASS!

TOWN...COMMUNITY...THESE WORDS HAVE LITTLE MEANING FOR YOU. FOR ALTHOUGH YOUR **BODY** IS THAT OF A **BRUTISH**, ENORMOUSLY POWERFUL **MONSTER**, YOUR **INTELLECT** AND EXPERIENCE IS THAT OF A MERE CHILD.

IN YOUR SHELTERED PAST, YOU HAVE KNOWN ONLY TWO MEN. YOUR **FATHER**, THE MAN WHO **CREATED** YOU...FROM PIECES OF DEAD ANIMALS AND CARCASSES; AND JERRY LIEDERMAN, THE MAN WHO **MURDERED** YOUR **FATHER** ONLY SHORT HOURS AGO.



NOW YOU ARE FEELING YOUR FIRST PANGS OF **CURIOSITY**. A FEW UNCERTAIN STEPS AND YOU ARE IN THE **MIDDLE** OF IT... RIGHT ON **MAIN STREET**. YOU SMILE. THIS IS **DISCOVERY**... **ADVENTURE**!



YOU ADVANCE A LITTLE FURTHER... YOUR CONFIDENCE MULTIPLYING WITH EACH DUSTY THUD OF YOUR MASSIVE FEET. IN THE DISTANCE YOU SEE HER...!

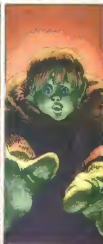


IT IS THE FIRST TIME YOU HAVE SEEN SUCH **BEAUTY**. YOU ARE **AWED**. YOUR EYES SPARKLE. YOUR SOUL IS **WARMED**.

...FOUR...
FIVE...
SIX...



MOMMY!
MOMMY!



SUDDENLY THERE IS AN **EXPLOSION!** YOU FEEL SOMETHING **RIP** INTO YOUR SHOULDER. BLADE...VIOLENTLY KNOCKING YOU DOWN...



YOU **LAY** THERE FOR A MOMENT, TRYING TO **COMPREHEND** WHAT IT IS THAT HAS **HIT** YOU. YOU **FAIL**. EVEN THE SIGHT OF A SMOKING SHOTGUN BARREL BRINGS NO UNDERSTANDING.



Frustration mingles with **pain**, synthesizing **fury!** A flash of bloodlust explodes in you! You **LASH OUT**. FOR THE FIRST TIME, CHILD YOU FEEL **HATE**.

YOUR FEET CARRY YOU **SWIFTLY** THROUGH THE MAIN STREET OF THE TOWN. YOU STOP MOMENTARILY TO PICK UP A **FRIEND**. AND THEN YOU ARE AGAIN **RUNNING RAPIDLY AWAY**.

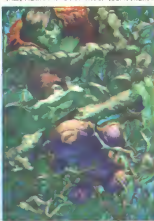


LIKE A FRIGHTENED **MOOSE**, YOU CRASH **CLUMSILY** THROUGH THE WOODS WHICH BORDER THE TOWN. **BEHIND** YOU, YOU CAN HEAR **PURSUERS** CURSING.

YOUR **HATE** HAS MELLOWED INTO **FEAR**. YOU DO NOT CARE **WHERE** YOU ARE GOING SO YOU DO NOT **LOOK**.



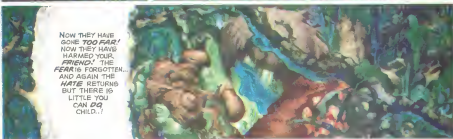
THE FALL STUNS YOU ONLY FOR AN **INSTANT**. THEN RISING...YOU REACH FOR YOUR **FRIEND**...



...AND FOR A **SECOND TIME**, YOU HEAR THE DREADED **EXPLOSION** OF A SHOTGUN!



NOW THEY HAVE GONE **TOO FAR!** NOW THEY HAVE HARMED YOUR **FRIEND!** THE **FEAR** IS FORGOTTEN... AND AGAIN THE **HATE** RETURNS BUT THERE IS LITTLE YOU CAN **DO** CHILD...!



YOU TAKE THE **PIECES** OF YOUR TATTERED FRIEND AND **HURRY OFF**. SOON THE SOUNDS OF PURSUIT DIE AWAY.



TO SHRUG OFF THE **NORRORS** OF THE LAST FEW MOMENTS, YOU SLOW TO A WALK AND THEN... YOU SPOT A **CLEARING** AND IN THE CLEARING...



...IS A **CABIN!**

BUT THE CABIN DOES NOT INTEREST YOU. WHAT **DOES** CATCH YOUR FANCY IS THE FRAGRANT WARMTH OF A FRESH BAKED **APPLE PIE** COOLING ON A STOOL.



CAUTIOUSLY YOU STEAL UP TO THE FOOD... TAKING ONE **BITE**, THEN TWO... NEVER NOTICING A FRAGILE FORM **BEHIND** YOU.

YOU **TURN** AT THE SOUND OF HER VOICE. YOU **WHIMPER** AT HER ADVANCE. YOU EXPECT TO BE **SCOLDED** ABOUT THE PIE.



PLEASE, I'M **BLIND!** I CAN'T SEE WHO YOU...

MMM...

YOU SOUND LIKE A **CHILD!** POOR THING, I'VE PROBABLY **FRIGHTENED** YOU!

YOU **CRINGE** AT HER TOUCH, EXPECTING **CRUELTY**. INSTEAD, SHE GENTLY CAR- ESSES YOUR **FACE**, YOUR **ARMS**, YOUR **TORSO**. SHE **SEES** YOU THROUGH THE EYES OF HER **FINGERTIPS**.



MY **LORD!** WHAT SORT OF CREATURE **ARE** YOU? A **CHILD** NO DOUBT, BUT...

SUDDENLY, THEY ARE UPON YOUR TRAIL AGAIN! FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE WOODS, YOU **HEAR** THEM... THE **TOWNSPEOPLE!**

IMPULSIVELY YOU **CLING** TO THIS WOMAN, WHINING AND SHAKING IN **FEAR** AND **FATIGUE**. SHE FEELS YOU **TREMBLE**, SHE HEARS YOUR **PURSUERS** AND SHE **KNOWS!**



THEY'RE **AFTER** YOU! QUICKLY! YOU CAN **HIDE** IN HERE!

THE WOMAN LOCKS YOU IN AND YOU ARE **CONTENT** TO **HIDE** IN THE SECURE BLACKNESS OF THE CABIN. YOU CAN ALREADY **HEAR** THE GUTTERAL VOICE OF YOUR ENEMY AS HE CONFRONTS THE WOMAN BEYOND THE DOOR.



WHAT DO YOU WANT?

WE'RE **AFTER** A **CHILD** MOLESTER, OLD WOMAN! A BIG UGLY FELLA, YOU HIDING HIM IN YOUR CABIN?

IF I AM, IT'S NONE OF YOUR AFFAIR!



YOU DO NOT KNOW WHAT **SUPERSTITION** IS, CHILD. YOU HAVE NEVER SEEN IT BEFORE. YET EVEN THROUGH THE CLOSED DOOR OF YOUR HIDING PLACE, YOU CAN FEEL ITS UGLY CLAWS AS THEY SINK DEEP INTO THE MINDS OF THE TOWNSPEOPLE.





WHAT DO YOU MEAN WE CAN'T GET A WARRANT FOR THAT OLD WOMAN'S ARREST? SHE'S A WITCH, JUDGE!

BUT YOU'VE NO PROOF OF THAT, JONATHAN. I CAN'T JUST HAND YOU A WARRANT WITHOUT PROOF TO SUBSTANTIATE...



HANG YOUR PROOF!



LISTEN! WE DON'T NEED A WARRANT! THE BIBLE SAYS WHEN MEN ARE GATHERED TOGETHER IN GOD'S NAME, HE'LL DO WHATEVER THEY ASK!

WELL, WE'RE GATHERED IN HIS NAME NOW! WE'RE OUT TO GET US A WITCH WOMAN! WE'RE DOING GOD'S WILL BY RIDDING THE EARTH OF HER KIND!

IT IS THE **BLIND WOMAN** WHO AWAKENS **FIRST**. HER SENSES ARE MORE ACUTE THAN YOURS, CHILD.



OH! I MUST HAVE DOZED OFF AFTER PUTTING THE FINISHING TOUCHES ON THAT TEDDY BEAR... I WONDER WHAT TIME.

WHAT'S ALL THAT NOISE OUTSIDE? HAMMERING... VOICES! ITS THOSE MEN AGAIN!



WEARILY SHE THROWS A SHAWL ABOUT HER SHOULDERS, AND SLOWLY WALKS TO HER DOOR, TURNS THE KNOB, AND STEPS OUTSIDE.

YOU'VE BROUGHT THE WHOLE TOWN WITH YOU THIS TIME! WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?

FOR A MOMENT, THE TOWNSPEOPLE MERELY **STARE** AT THE BLIND WOMAN... LETTING **HATE, FEAR** AND **SUPERSTITION** GROW WITHIN THEM!



DEATH TO THE WITCH!

LORD, NO!

THEN, LIKE A DAM, THEIR PASSIONS **BURST**, AND A FLOOD OF SAVAGE FURY DROWNS THE OLD WOMAN.

KILL THE HAG!



BURN HER!

PLEASE... I'M NOT A WITCH!

AND AN **INNOCENT PAWN** IS SWEEP ALONG IN AN UNCARING TIDE... TO HER DOOM!

MORE TORCHES ARE THROWN UPON THE KINDLING WOOD BENEATH THE STAKE! THE FLAMES SHOOT LONG DESTRUCTIVE TENDRILES INTO THE BLIND WOMAN'S FACE, AND IN HER LAST MOMENTS, CHILD, SHE THINKS OF YOU!

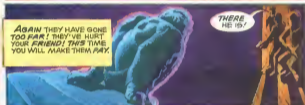
CHILD!
RUN! SAVE
YOURSELF AND
RUN!



No, THEY ARE NOT DONE YET WITH THEIR BLOODY LITTLE VENDETTA? YOU CAN SEE THEM THROUGH THE WINDOW AS THEY COME FOR YOU... BUT YOU WON'T RUN... THIS TIME



AGAIN THEY HAVE GONE TOO FAR! THEY'VE HURT YOUR FRIEND! THIS TIME YOU WILL MAKE THEM PAY.



YOU MOVE TO CHARGE THEM... AND YOU AGAIN HEAR THAT ACCURSED EXPLOSION! PAIN HITS YOU IN YOUR LEG AND YOU CRUMBLE UPON ONE KNEE LIKE A BROKEN DOLL!



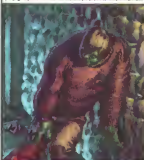
BUT YOU PAY NO ATTENTION TO THE BLACK-RED POOL OF YOUR OWN BLOOD AS IT FLOWS FREELY UPON THE CABIN FLOOR. YOU REACH BACK WITH A FLUID MOTION AND GRASP A LEG OF A HEAVY OAKEN TABLE BEHIND YOU!



VIOLENTLY YOU HEAVE IT OVER YOUR HEAD, SLAMMING IT HARD INTO YOUR ENEMIES... CRUSHING THEM LIKE GNATS UNDER YOUR AWESOME WEIGHT!



SILENCE. SLOWLY YOU **RISE** AND THE BULLET IMBEDDED IN YOUR CALF SHOOTS SPLINTERS OF SEARING **ASONY** THROUGH YOUR ENTIRE FRAME.

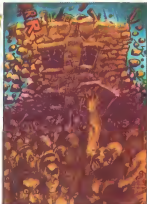


CAUTIOUSLY YOU AVOID THE TABLE UNDER WHICH THREE FLATTENED CORPSES LIE. YOU REACH THE WALL AND **LEAN** HEAVILY UPON IT...

THEN YOU **STRAIN** AND YOU **SWEAT** AND YOU **BITE** YOUR LIP UNTIL THE BLOOD FLOWS WARMLY OVER YOUR CHIN.



AND JUST WHEN YOU THINK YOU CAN STRAIN **NO MORE**, THE **WALL BUCKLES...**

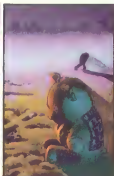


TOTALLY DESTROYING AN ENTIRE TOWN!

KA BRUMBLE!

NOW THERE IS BUT **ONE** THING LEFT **UNDONE**. ALL THE **RAGE**, ALL THE **VIOLENCE** THAT IS PENT UP INSIDE YOU... YOU MUST **RELEASE** IT, CHILD. YOU MUST **CRY!**

AND WHEN ALL YOUR TEARS ARE **SPENT**, YOU KNOW IT IS TIME TO GO, CHILD. THERE IS NOTHING MORE YOU CAN DO FOR THE OLD WOMAN... NO WAY YOU CAN **RE-PAY** HER. BUT YOU CAN LEAVE YOUR **FRIEND**, CHILD...



...TO SILENTLY WATCH OVER HER... **FOREVER!**

THE WORLD, CHILD, IS HARD, *CRUEL*. A PLACE WITHOUT REASON TO THE
TO THE INNOCENT, A PLACE WHERE THE SMALL, THE HELPLESS, THE PURE
ARE GOILED AND *RUINED*, EVEN *MURDERED* WITHOUT *MERCY*.

BUT THESE THINGS YOU ARE COMING TO UNDERSTAND. ONLY HOURS HAVE YOU
GAZED AT THE *WONDER*, THE AWE INSPIRING *VASTNESS* OF A WORLD
THAT WAS NEVER *YOURS*...

...AND IT *DOOMED* YOUR SWEET
SOUL... BUT, CHILD... *POOR* CHILD...
HAVE YOU EVEN A *SOUL*?
DADDY ALWAYS SAID A SOUL
MAKES MAN *DIVINE*.

CAN A CHILD CREATED IN HOPELESS
LOVE... CREATED FROM RANCID
DEAD FLESH... CREATED FROM
NOTHING... HAVE THAT *DIVINE*
SPIRIT, THAT FLAWLESS HEAVENLY
SPARK THAT MAKES MAN
DIFFERENT FROM BEASTS?

IN YOUR LONELY, PAINFUL
WANDERINGS HAVE YOU YET
BECOME... *DIVINE*?



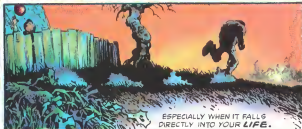
CHILDHOOD'S END



HOW **QUICKLY** AN INNOCENT CHILD'S HURT CAN BE **FORGOTTEN...**



...BY THE MERE MAGIC OF SOMETHING SO WONDERFULLY SIMPLE AS A **SHOOTING STAR**.



ESPECIALLY WHEN IT FALLS DIRECTLY INTO YOUR **LIFE**.



WHAT **IS** IT CHILD? WHAT WONDERFUL SOMETHING IS **THIS**?



SOMETHING AN **ANGEL** TOSSED ASIDE FOR A FRIGHTENED LITTLE ONE LIKE **YOU** TO FIND?



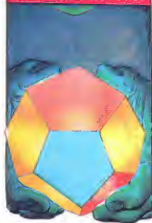
OH!! A **STAR** FALLEN FROM **HEAVEN**!

DADDY OFTEN TALKED OF HEAVEN AND HOW WONDERFUL IT WILL BE WHEN WE GET TO GO THERE! HEAVEN IS **FULL** OF TWINKLING DELIGHTS.

AND YOU KNOW **THIS** IS A PIECE OF HEAVEN FOR SURE DON'T YOU?

MAYBE IT'S A STAR THAT FELL OUT
OF GOD'S CROWN. AND YOU,
CHILD, HAVE IT.

THIS SHINING STAR MAKES YOU
SOMETHING MORE SPECIAL THAN
ANYONE ELSE IN THE WORLD.



YOU HAVE IT! YOU HAVE GOD'S
STAR! YOU!



IT'LL BE SO DIFFERENT FROM
NOW ON, THEY...THE PEOPLE...
WILL LOVE YOU. THEY'LL SAY,
"GOD LOVES THIS CHILD!"



AND YOU'LL HOLD IT HIGH FOR
EVERYONE TO SEE, AND THEY'LL
SMILE AND LOVE YOU AND
THEY'LL WONDER AT YOUR
MAGIC STAR FROM HEAVEN.

BUT RIGHT NOW NO ONE
ELSE CAN SEE YOUR STAR...



...BECAUSE IT REALLY IS ALL
YOURS, CHILD. YOURS ALONE
TO LOOK AT, TO TOUCH, TO LOVE.
AND IT LOVES YOU! SEE HOW
IT SPARKLES?





YES, CHILD, EVERYTHING
WILL BE **DIFFERENT**.

BUT RIGHT NOW,
YOU'RE **HUNGRY**.



YOU NEED TO FIND A
HIDING PLACE

A PLACE TO **HIDE** THE PRECIOUS STAR.
THERE, UNDER THAT BUSH. NO ONE
WILL FIND IT **THERE**.



HOW **CLEVER** YOU
ARE! YOU HAVE
LEARNED A **LOT**...
NOW YOU CAN GO.



GO AND FIND
SOMETHING
TO **EAT**.



AND NOT
WORRY ABOUT
YOUR **STAR**.

FOR WHO COULD
EVER BE AS
SMART AS YOU,
CHILD...TO
FIND IT?



AND MAKE IT
THEIR **OWN!**

YOU DO NOT KNOW AS YOU SEARCH
FOR FOOD THAT THE LITTLE BOY
HAS **YOUR** STAR.



YOU DO NOT KNOW THE STAR
TWINKLES AS BEAUTIFULLY FOR
HIM AS IT DOES FOR **YOU**...BUT THEN
NEITHER DO YOU KNOW...



...THAT IT
BEGINS TO
THROB AND
HUM!



THEN **ERUPTS** WITH AN
INTERNAL COSMIC **FURY** THAT
YOU COULD NEVER **BEGIN** TO
COMPREHEND.



WHEN YOU **RETURN** FOR YOUR
STAR YOU SEE **THEM...** THE
PEOPLE, CHILD.

YOU WATCH THEM BECOME **SAD**.
A LADY CRIES, AND THERE'S A
LITTLE **BOY**, ONE YOU RECOGNIZE
TO BE LIKE **YOU**. HE'S SICK...
OR SOMETHING.

PEOPLE HAVE PUSHED YOU
TOO FAR **BEFORE**. THEY
HURT YOU. AND YOU
FIXED THEM.



NOW! GO FIX **THESE**
PEOPLE!



THAT BOY. **HE** DID IT!
HE BROKE YOUR STAR. HE
WANTED EVERYBODY TO
LOVE **HIM...** NOT **YOU!**



YOU WATCH THEM ALL ACT VERY **FUNNY**.
THEN YOU WATCH THEM GO AWAY.



LUCKY **YOU!** THEY'RE **GONE!**
BUT LOOK WHAT SOMEBODY
DID!



LET'S SEE... NOW
TRAGIC THIS LIFE.
SOMETIMES, POOR
CHILD THAT'S ALL
THERE IS **LEFT** TO
DO. CRY.



IN THIS TINY VILLAGE IT ISN'T
HARD TO FIND A **MOTOR**
CAR.



BUT CHILD YOU DON'T REALIZE THE LITTLE
BOY IS TERRIBLY **HURT**. HE DIDN'T **MEAN**
TO STEAL YOUR TOY, BUT HE'S **SUFFERING**
FOR IT.

THAT WONDERFUL STAR YOU FOUND WAS
SOMETHING YOU'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND. FEW
PEOPLE COULD. IT CAME FROM BEYOND THE
BORDER. BEYOND... BEYOND... EVEN... THAT...

AND INSIDE IT WERE LITTLE **THINGS...**
HUNGRY THINGS...WAITING TO COME
OUT AND **FEED.**

YOU LISTEN HARD. YOU HEAR THE MAN TALK IN THERE. BUT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. YOU DON'T CARE.



NEVER SEEN NOTAIN LIKE IT!
IT'S A KIND OF SPORE!

I GOT A THEORY... THESE THINGS ATTACH TO THE SKIN. ON THE FACE, NEAR THE BRAIN...



CAN'T BE SURE, BUT I BELIEVE THESE CREATURES ARE ACTUALLY FEEDING ON THE ELECTRICAL IMPULSES GENERATED BY THE BRAIN.



SINCE THE BOY WAS SEDATED, THEY'VE BECOME INACTIVE. LESS ELECTRICAL CHARGES EMITTED DURING SLEEP.

IF WE RIP THEM OFF, THEY'LL LEAVE THE BOY HORRIBLY DISFIGURED...



...IF WE LEAVE THEM ON... THEY'LL REPRODUCE MORE SPORES!



AND IF THEY'RE CUT, THEY'LL LEAVE SOMETHING AKIN TO A TICK'S HEAD AND GROW ANOTHER BODY.



ANY AND ALL FACTORS ARE UNKNOWN AND FRIGHTENING! WHERE'D THEY COME FROM? DAMNED IF I COULD TELL YOU!

THE BOY BROKE YOUR STAR! HE BROKE IT! AND YOU MUST PUNISH HIM, CHILD... SMASH HIM!



PUNISH HIM! NOW!



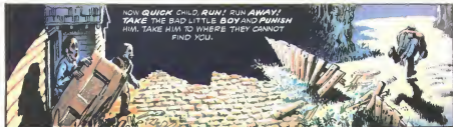
CRASH!

WHAT THE UUGH!



KLUDEW!

DON'T LET THEM STOP YOU! NO ONE MUST EVER STOP YOU AGAIN! HURT THEM! HURT THEM ALL!



NOW **QUICK** CHILD, **RUN!** RUN AWAY!
TAKE THE BAD LITTLE BOY AND **PUNISH**
HIM. TAKE HIM TO WHERE THEY CANNOT
FIND YOU.



GOD A'MIGHTY,
GET THE SHERIFF!
SOME KINDA **MONSTER**
JUST **KILLED** OR CAAN...
KIDNAPPED MY
BOY! **GET**
HIM!

FASTER! RUN FASTER!
YOU CAN HEAR THEM!
THEY'RE **AFTER** YOU!



CLIMB, CHILD, CLIMB! THEY HATE
YOU! **CLIMB!**



THAT'S HIM!
HE WON'T **STOP!**
HE'LL **KILL** THE
BOY! GOTTA **HALT**
THAT **MANIAC!**

MAYBE I
CAN GET A
CLEAR SHOT...
JUST **ONE**
CHANCE!



THEY SHOOT YOU AGAIN AND AGAIN! WON'T THEY EVER STOP?!



GOT HIM!

DEAR GOD! THE MONSTER'S STILL MOVING! GET UP THERE! GET HIM! SAVE THAT KID!



THEY'RE COMING FOR YOU...
DADDY ALWAYS TAUGHT YOU TO **FORGIVE**... TO **LOVE** THOSE WHO EVEN HATE YOU...



...BUT SOMEHOW, NOW...
IT DOESN'T MATTER.



NOTHING SEEMS TO MATTER EXCEPT... FOR SOME REASON...



...FORGIVENESS.



BUT CHILD, YOU DON'T EVEN REALIZE THAT IN YOUR GENTLE FORGIVENESS, YOU GAVE **LIFE** A CHANCE. YOU DON'T REALIZE THE SPORES LEFT THE BOY AND CAME TO YOU.

BUT WHAT MATTER... IF ONLY YOU COULD **FLY** AWAY FROM HERE... BE FREE OF HATE, FEAR... **UNREASON**... FLY AWAY TO HEAVEN... TO BE **FREE**, TO BE **HAPPY**.



AND AS YOU **FLY**, YOUR HEART FILLED WITH PAIN... SUDDENLY AS GENTLY AS A THISTLE ON THE BREEZE, YOU BECOME **LIGHT**. SO LIGHT, AND YOU **FLOAT** AWAY TO THE EDGE OF THE WORLD,

YOU'RE **FREE**, CHILD, TO CHASE THE SHOUTING WIND ALONG IN THE ENDLESS AZURE HALLS OF THE MOST HIGH. FREE FROM **PAIN** AND **TERROR**. TO **FLY FOREVER**. DADDY IS WAITING TO HOLD HIS SWEET CHILD AGAIN... OUT THERE.

JUST RIDE THE BREEZE ACROSS THE CLOUDS, HE'S THERE WAITING. JUST BEYOND FOREVER, IN THE LAND OF THE **DIVINE**. JUST BEYOND **FOREVER**.



RAIN CLOUDS TRY IN VAIN TO SHIELD
THE CITY OF SALEM FROM THE FULL MOON!



"I WAS ALBERT TUSK, HEIR TO THE
TUSK FAMILY FISH OIL FORTUNE! I
INVESTED IT ALL IN A DOGFOOD
COMPANY!"



"THAT BITE CURSED ME! TONIGHT, THE PEOPLE WHO FORMERLY RESPECTED ME SHRINK BACK IN SHOCK AND FEAR!"



STORY: JACK BUTTERWORTH / ART: RICH CORBEN



I NEVER
ATTACKED
ANYONE, BUT THEY
RUN IN TERROR!
FOOLS!

AFTER A
ROUGH DAY IN
THE BUSINESS ARENA,
THE LAST THING I
WANT TO DO IS
ATTACK
SOMEBODY!



IT'S A
TOUGH LIFE! MY
DOGFOOD COMPANY IS
FAILING BECAUSE PEOPLE
PREFER TO FEED THEIR PETS
SCRAPS! AND NOW I'VE
BEEN TURNED INTO A
WEREWOLF! WON'T
ANYBODY TRY TO
UNDERSTAND?

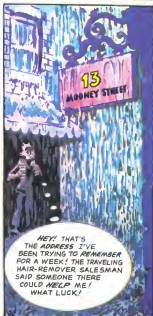


HI, YOU
WOLF!

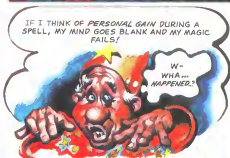
MAYBE I
SHOULD HAVE
STAYED
HOME...



AND NOW
RAIN! I CAN'T
STAND THE
SMELL OF
WET FUR!



HEY! THAT'S
THE ADDRESS I'VE
BEEN TRYING TO REMEMBER
FOR A WEEK! THE TRAVELING
HAIR-REMOVER SALESMAN
SAID SOMEONE THERE
COULD HELP ME!
WHAT LUCK!

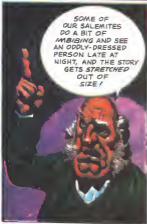












PROLOGUE



AN ANGEL SHY OF HELL!

THE **HOLY-COST** COULD NOT HAVE DONE IT **ALL**. THE FIZZ BOMBS, THE GINKO PERSONNEL, WHAM-SLAMMERS... EVEN THE MULTI-HEADED CLOUD-TO-GROUND FULL-NEILSON BIG WHOP MISSILES CANNOT BE HELD WHOLLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE **DESOLATION!** THE **HOLY-COST** DESTROYED AND SEGREGATED PEOPLES, BUT **KANSAS** MUST HAVE LOOKED LIKE THIS FROM THE **START**.

IN THE 12 YEARS SINCE **H-CI**, NOTHING MUCH **ELSE** HAS CHANGED EITHER, THE RELIGIOUS WARS... **BLESSED SMALL** AND **BLESSED BIG**... CONTINUE WITH MUCH OF THEIR OLD STEAM.

IN THE U.S., THE MAJOR GROUPS SURVIVE... THE **CATLICKS**, RICHEST AND STRONGEST OF THE TWO, AND THE **PROTSTINTS** WHO ARE #2, BUT THEY TRY HARDER, THERE WAS ANOTHER GROUP, THE **DAVIDISTS**, BUT THEY ARE THOUGHT TO BE EXTINCT...

HARD JOHN APPLE HAS NO RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE. HIS MARK IS FREELANCER, PRESENTLY WORKING FOR THE **PROTSTINTS**. **HARD JOHN KILLS FOR COIN**, AND HE'S VERY, VERY GOOD AT IT, THE **BEST**, WITH PISTOLS, GRENADES AND MACHINE-GUNS.

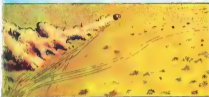


WITHIN THE WRECKAGE OF THE **TWIRL-A-WHIRL**, HE CAN FIND NOTHING OF USE, NO **EQUIPMENT**, NO **MANUALS**, NO **CODEBOOKS**, YES, MOST IMPORTANTLY, NO **CODEBOOKS**.

SO **HARD JOHN APPLE** JUST DRIVES AWAY AS THE LAST DROP OF **GO-GOOK** FALLS FROM THE **TWIRL-A-WHIRL'S** WHIRLY TWIRLY.



THE DAY GETS INTO FULL SWING IN KANSAS, BLUE AND BROWN... AND FLAT, LIKE A PANCAKE. THE PROTSTINT BIG SHOTS COULD NEVER UNDERSTAND WHY HE WANTED KANSAS. WHY ANYONE WOULD WANT IT.



"LISSEN, HARD JOHN. WE'RE GONNA DIVVY UP THE U.S."

"FINE, I'LL TAKE KANSAS."

THEY LAUGHED. THEY FELL ON THEIR BUTTS, LAUGHING.



"KANSAS? YOU MEAN THE ONE-TIME STATE OF KANSAS? YOU GOTTA BE KIDDIN'..."

"LOTTA OPPORTUNITY OUT KANSAS WAY. REMINDS ME OF HOME. ALL THEM FAR-OUT MOUNTAINS, GREEN FIELDS, AMBER GRAIN..."



"HE'S CRAZY" THEY THOUGHT, HE'S NEVER BEEN TO KANSAS OR HE'D KNOW..."

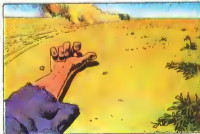
"IT'S CRAWLIN' WITH CATLUCKS." "OKAY, IT'S YOURS."



"THINK NOTHINGS OF IT! YOU'LL HAVE TO CLEAR IT OUT FOR YOURSELF THOUGH. THE CATLUCKS WON'T RECOGNIZE IT AS HARD JOHN APPLE'S OWN PRIVATE STATE."



INSANE. CRAZY TIME. WHAT MAN WOULD TAKE ON AN ENTIRE STATE OF CATLUCKS BY HIMSELF? AND FOR WHAT EARTHLY PURPOSE? FOR KANSAS? THEY AGREED HE WAS MAD, BUT WERE HAPPY TO SEND HIM THERE. NO ONE ELSE WANTED TO GO.



BUT YOU CAN BELIEVE IT. HARD JOHN APPLE KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING.

BY NOW, HARD JOHN HAS COVERED 200 MILES. MOST OF KANSAS IS **KNOWN** TO HIM, BUT HE OFTEN FINDS HIMSELF **DOUBLING BACK** OVER OLD TERRITORY. **ROAD MAPS** AREN'T WORTH A DAMN PARTLY BECAUSE THERE AREN'T ANY MORE **ROADS**... AND PARTLY BECAUSE THE OLD LANGUAGE **DIED** WITH THE **HOLY-COST**.



THIS KNOWLEDGE HELPS HIM **SURVIVE**... ALONG WITH HIS TRUSTY FLAME THRO--



BUT HUNGER IS UPON HIM, AND HARD JOHN LOCATES A LONG-DEAD GROCERY STORE. HE'S LEARNED MANY WORDS SINCE HE FOUND THE FIRST SET OF **MANUALS**, BUT THE **PICTURES** ON THE LABELS ARE **LIFESAVERS**.



MORE OF THEM, IN THE **MEAT FREEZER**. CHRIST DAMMIT, THE **CATLICKS** JUST WON'T GET IT THROUGH THEIR **HEADS**. WELL, EVEN **MISS MARY** AIN'T GONNA HELP THIS LOT...



FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS LIFE, **HARD JOHN APPLE** STOPS COLD. A DOZEN YEARS IN KANSAS HAVE PROVIDED MANY **SURPRISES**, NEAR-FATAL **CATASTROPHIES** AND SUCH, BUT NEVER HAS HE BEEN **STYMIED**.



HIS EYES ADJUST **SHARPLY** TO THE SIGHT BEFORE HIM. THESE ARE NOT **CATLICKS**... NOT **PROTSTINTS**. THESE WERE PEOPLE HE'D NEVER **SEEN** BEFORE.



GIVE
ME YOUR
HAND!



DAVIDISTS! I
THOUGHT YOU WERE ALL RUBBED
OUT AGES AGO!

WELL, WE'LL
TAKE CARE OF THAT ALL
RIGHT NOW...



AW, HELL...
IT AIN'T WORTH
THE EFFORT...



ALL RIGHT, YOU PEOPLE,
LISSEN UP! YOU'RE TRESPASSIN'! THIS
HERE'S KANSAS, AND KANSAS IS
MINE! SO VAMOOSE!

NOW I'M GONNA BE COMIN' BACK
THIS WAY IN A COUPLE YEARS, AND YOU'D
BETTER NOT BE HERE WHEN I RETURN.
SAVVY? UNDERSTAND?



YEAH... I KINDA
FIGURED YOU'D GET
THE MESSAGE!

TWO AND MILES LATER, HARD JOHN STOPS TO PONDER HIS BEANS. CATLICK'S ARE THE PROBLEM NOW, HE REALIZES. BUT THEN WHAT? THE PROTSTINTS WON'T STAND STILL IF THEY FIND OUT WHAT HE'S UP TO....



AND WHAT ABOUT THE OTHERS? PAST THE MISSISSIPPI, THE MOUNTAINS, THE BIG WASH. ? THAT'S WHERE THE REAL THREAT LIES. WELL, HE THOUGHT, HE WAS A HEATHEN. BUT THERE, THEY PRAY TO COWS!

SO WHAT TO DO NOW? MAKE A DEAL WITH THE PROTSTINT BIG SHOTS? LET THEM IN ON HIS DISCOVERY AND HOPE THEY DON'T SLIP HIM A SHIV?



NO...NO GOOD. PLAN GOES AS BEFORE. EVERYTHING'S UNDER THE TABLE NOW! THE POKER FACE REMAINS.

CATLICK GENE SITE...
THREE HOURS LATER...



THE GATE GUARD WAS A RECENT ADDITION. AND IT MADE HARD JOHN ALL THE MORE NERVOUS. HE HAD BEEN HERE MANY TIMES BEFORE, BUT SECURITY HAD ALWAYS BEEN MINIMAL!

AS WELL, THERE WERE MORE GUARDS ALONG THE WAY! AND THE REASONS WERE OBVIOUS.

SOME SEVEN YEARS AGO, HE'D DISCOVERED THIS PARTICULAR GENE SITE... THE ONLY ONE HE'S ALLOWED TO REMAIN STANDING. A PRIVATE PLACE. A PLACE TO THINK...AND PLAN.

BUT LOOK AT IT NOW! A VERITABLE CESSPOOL OF GUTTERAL SLUT DRAINAGE IN SEMI-HUMAN FORM, WITH FLAUNTING BALLOONS AND VILE MUCK-WUCKS.



DAMN CAT-LICK'S! THEY HAD NO RIGHT!!

THOSE LOVELY NYMPHOS
BIG AND SOFT AND OOH,
SO WARM. HE HAD
WATCHED THEM BLOOM
FROM TEDDY BEARS TO...



YEAH... TEDDY BEARS TO
WHAT? THE COUNTLESS
HOURS OF PLEASURE HE
SPENT HERE FADE HARD...



...BUT HE SHAKES IT OFF...HE
KNOWS WHAT MUST BE DONE.

THE NYMPHOS HAVE NOW BECOME PRIMED AND
HARD JOHN APPLE KNOWS THAT MORE GENE
STUFFS WILL GET THROUGH EVENTUALLY. TO STOP
THE CATLUCKS FROM GROWING AND THRIVING IN
NUMBERS, HE MUST NIP THIS IN THE BUD...



DAMN SHAME, TOO...



...HE REALLY LIKED THE NYMPHOS...



DUSK. SCATTERINGS OF CLOUD DISAPPEAR IN A BLOOD RED SKY AS THE SUN TURNS ITS FACE.



HARD JOHN APPLE IS HOME AFTER A LONG HARD DAY OF KILLING.

MOVING PAST HIS HIDDEN FORTIFICATIONS, HARD JOHN COMES TO A HALT ON CONCRETE SURFACE.



FOR HIM, *RELIGIOUS* SERVICES ARE ABOUT TO BEGIN. HE PULLS A *TOP SECRET OPERATIONS MANUAL* FROM THE SEAT.

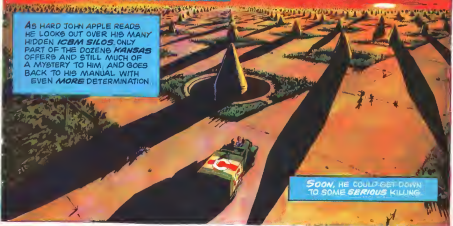


AND, SETTLING HIMSELF ON THE HOOD OF HIS TRUCK, HE MOMENTARILY PAUSES BEFORE BEGINNING THE MANUAL. HE LOOKS *OUTWARD*, AND ALL HIS DAILY MISGIVINGS, THE THREAT OF THE *CATLUCKS*, THE *PROTSTINTS*, AND ALL THE *OTHERS* DISSOLVES FROM HIS MIND. HE FEELS SECURE.



SOON, WHENEVER HE CAN GAIN A STRONG UNDERSTANDING OF THIS STRANGE LANGUAGE *ENG-LISH* AND THE EVEN STRANGER LINGO OF THE *AIR FORCE CODEBOOKS* AND *MANUALS*, THEN HE WOULD KNOW *ALL* HE WOULD EVER *NEED* KNOW.

AS HARD JOHN APPLE READS HE LOOKS OUT OVER HIS MANY HIDDEN *ICBM SILOS*. ONLY PART OF THE DOZENS *KANSAS* OFFERS AND STILL MUCH OF A MYSTERY TO HIM. AND GOES BACK TO HIS MANUAL WITH EVEN *MORE* DETERMINATION.



SOON, HE COULD GET DOWN TO SOME *SERIOUS* KILLING.

HARRY

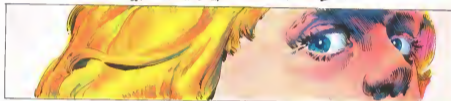
JEFF JONES

ROSES ARE RED
VIOLETS ARE BLUE...





AAAWWWKK!





I DON'T LIKE IT, HARRY. MAYBE YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE SET FIRE TO MOMMY AND DADDY.

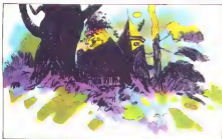




I'M AFRAID,
HARRY. I WAS
NEVER AFRAID
LIKE THIS BEFORE,
EVEN DURING THE
FIRE. THEY JUST
DIDN'T UNDERSTAND
YOU, HARRY.



THEY SHOULDN'T HAVE
THROWN YOU IN THE
GARBAGE CAN AND GOT
YOUR HEAD STAINED.



IT'S GOING
TO BE
GETTING DARK
OUT THERE SOON,
HARRY. I DON'T
WANT TO SLEEP
IN THE WOODS
AGAIN.

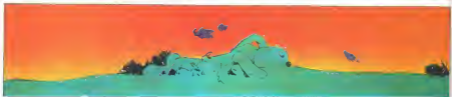


MAYBE IF WE GO
BACK AND TELL THE
TRUTH — ABOUT THE
GARBAGE CAN, HARRY.
MAYBE THEY WON'T
PUT YOU IN JAIL,
THEN.





AAAAAAAAAAAA



OH, LOOK, A
BUNNY RABBIT.
WHAT'S YOUR
NAME LITTLE
RABBIT?



DEAD RUIN

THE STARS WERE FADING
AROUND HIM AND HE
COULDN'T REMEMBER WHY

AND NOW A TERROR WAS
STALKING HIM AND CLOSING
IN FAST. ALTHOUGH HE
COULDN'T SEE IT YET, ITS
CHOKING PRESENCE
GRIPPED HIS CHEST



BREATHLESSLY HE SLOWED TO ADJUST THE
RUBBER AIR HOSE.



AND BACKED
INTO A HOLE

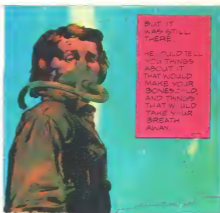


HIS HEAD REELING AS HE GRASPED AIR

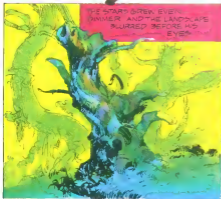


BUT IT
WAS STILL
THERE.

HE COULD TELL
YOU THINGS
ABOUT IT
THAT WOULD
MAKE YOUR
BONES COLD,
AND THINGS
THAT WOULD
TAKE YOUR
BREATH
AWAY.



THE STARS GREW EVEN
DIMMER, AND THE LANDSCAPE
BLURRED BEFORE HIS
EYES.



AND NOW HE COULD GO NO FURTHER IN THE
END, IT WOULD ONLY LEAD HIM AWAY FROM HIMSELF.

FINALLY SOMEBODY WAS HERE.



INEVITABLY—

JUST AS HIS AIR
RAN OUT.



PROLOGUE

AFTER THAT WONDERFUL MORNING, **NO ONE** HAD TO EAT STICKY, LUMPY CEREAL BECAUSE IT WAS **"GOOD"** FOR THEM.



... SHE WOULD **NEVER** BE PUNISHED THE WAY **THEY** HAD PUNISHED **HER**. NO. NEVER, NEVER, DOLLY WAS GOING TO BE JUST AS HAPPY AS **EVE** WAS...



AFTER THAT WONDERFUL MORNING, NO ONE HAD TO **COMB** THEIR HAIR, OR **BRUSH** THEIR TEETH, OR BE SURE THEY **WASHED** BEHIND THEIR EARS.

AFTER THAT WONDERFUL MORNING THE WORLD WAS **CHANGING** FOR THEM. NOW IT WAS AN ENDLESS **VACATION**. NO MORE SCHOOL, NO MORE BORING HOMEWORK.

NOW EVE HAD LOTS OF TIME FOR FEEDING DOLLY. MORNING, AFTERNOON OR EVENING, ANYTIME OR ALWAYS. BUT IF DOLLY DIDN'T **FEEL** LIKE EATING.

...AND **TONY** WHO NO LONGER HAD TO SUFFER HIS PARENTS' EVER-CONSTANT FIGHTING...

...AND **MAGGIE**, WHO GOT TO THROW AWAY THOSE AWFUL BRACES THE DENTIST MADE HER WEAR.



YES, IT REALLY WAS A WONDERFUL MORNING.

NOW **CRICKETS** COULD
BE HEARD WHERE BE-
FORE THERE WAS ONLY
THE ANGRY DIN OF
TRAFFIC. NOW
BUTTERFLIES, LONG
DRIVEN BY DEADLY
EXHAUST FUMES
RETURNED TO FLUTTER
ABOVE NEW FLOWERS
AND GREENERY.



NOW BIRDS
WHEELED IN A
CLEAR SKY



... UNTAINTED
BY THE DARK
SMEAR OF
INDUSTRIAL
SMOKE...



... VOID OF THE
CHOKING SMELL,
THE BITTER
STING OF
POLLUTION...



... FREE EVEN
OF THE GRIM
SHADOW OF
POSSIBLE
NUCLEAR
HOLOCAUST.

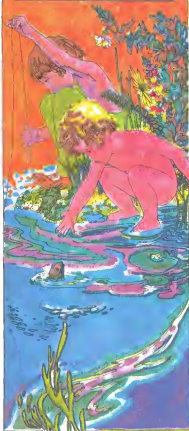


FOR *THESE* AND A HUNDRED OTHER REASONS, THIS, LIKE **ALL** MORNINGS NOW, WAS...

A WONDERFUL MORNING!

STORY AND ART: FERNANDO FERNANDEZ / COLOR: RICH CORBEN

THE RIVERS AND STREAMS RAN
CLEAN, BUBBLED BRIGHTLY,
WITHOUT THE GREASE, THE SILT,
THE WASTE, **FISH** CAME AGAIN.



THE SEA ONCE MORE WAS TO **PLAY** IN, TO FROLIC
HAPPILY. OIL SLICKS DID NOT DARKEN THE WAVES,
GARBAGE DID NOT COVER THE SPARKLING BEACHES.



WHAT A
WONDERFUL
MORNING...

...WITHOUT
THEM.





NOW, EVERYBODY RAN.
RAN THROUGH THIS
WONDERFUL MORNING.



SO MANY YEARS OF *HOPE*
HAD PASSED UNFULFILLED,
BUT NOW, THEY WERE FIN-
ALLY GETTING IT... A NEW
HUMANITY, FULL OF LOVE.



WITHOUT HATE...
WITHOUT GRUDGES...

WITHOUT
AMBITION...
WITHOUT
WAR...



WITHOUT SEX...



WITHOUT VIOLENCE...

FASTER
FASTER! WE'RE
CLOSING IN!

HE'S
TIRING!
JUST A
LITTLE
MORE...

THEN
WE'LL
HAVE
HIM!



THE
CYCLOPEAN
EYE IN ITS
FORMICA CASE,
ASSASSIN OF
CHILDHOOD
IMAGINATION...

... LAY MUTE
AND *BLIND*.
IT WAS NOT
NECESSARY TO
SPEND HOURS
AND HOURS IN
FRONT OF IT...

... AVOIDING
REALITY...

... BECAUSE
REALITY WAS
WONDERFUL!



EXCEPT...

THERE
WAS STILL
THE *LAST*
ONE.





GIMME
A **BREAK**,
KIDS...!

Y-YOU
DON'T KNOW
WHAT YOU'RE
DOIN'..!

I WAS
A KID ONCE
MYSELF..!

PLEASE!
DON' CHA
UNDER-
STAND..? I
CAN'T **HELP**
IT..!

YOU'RE
ALL GONNA
GROW UP
SOMEDAY,
TOO!

F'R GOD'S
SAKE...LISTEN!
YA GOTTA LISTEN..!
PLEA--



HE **SCREAMED** LIKE ALL THE
OTHERS. HE WOULD **DIE**, EYES
STARING IN **DISBELIEF** LIKE
ALL THE OTHERS. AS ALWAYS,
THE GROWN-UPS JUST DIDN'T
UNDERSTAND...

THIS WAS
NECESSARY!



THERE WAS NO
ALTERNATIVE...



CHILDREN *HAD*
TO DO IT TO SAVE
THE WORLD...
THEIR WORLD.



THE LAST ECHO OF
THE LAST ADULT
ON *EARTH* FADED
INTO NOTHINGNESS.



THERE WERE NO
MORE GROWN-UPS.



AFTER
THIS DAY,
THE WORLD
WOULD KNOW
ONLY THE
SOUND OF
CHILDREN
LAUGHING...

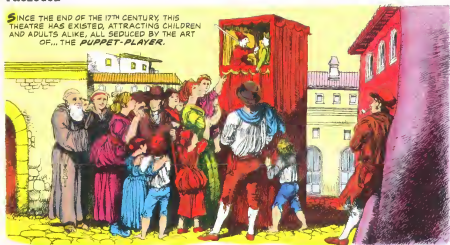


AND THEY
WOULD
NEVER
PERMIT THE
ADULTS TO
COME
AGAIN...

NEVER
NEVER
NEVER
NEVER
NEVER

PROLOGUE

SINCE THE END OF THE 17TH CENTURY, THIS THEATRE HAS EXISTED, ATTRACTING CHILDREN AND ADULTS ALIKE, ALL SEDUCED BY THE ART OF... THE **PUPPET-PLAYER**.



THESE ARTISTS TRAVELED FROM TOWN TO TOWN, DRAWING FASCINATED CROWDS IN PUBLIC SQUARES TO WITNESS PERFORMANCES BY THEIR COLORFUL CREATIONS, LIVING ON WHATEVER GRATUITIES THE SPECTATORS COULD PROVIDE...



AND *SOME* PROVIDED NONE AT ALL, FINDING MUCH THAT WAS **SINISTER** IN THE OFTEN GROTESQUE PUPPETS, REMINDED PERHAPS OF **FOLK TALES** OF EVIL GNOMES AND HALFING CREATURES...



BUT **MOST** WERE DELIGHTED BY WHAT THEY SAW, IMPRESSED BY THE ARTISTRY OF THE MEN WHO LOVINGLY SCRIPTED ALL THE PLAYS, SEWED ALL THE COSTUMES, PASSIONATELY CARED FOR EVERY **ASPECT** OF THEIR UNIQUE CHARGES...



...GINO MALASPINA MIGHT HAVE BEEN SUCH A MAN. BUT HE DID WHAT HE DID WITHOUT PASSION, AND MOST CERTAINLY...WITHOUT LOVE.

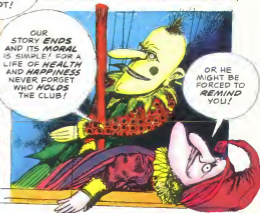


FOR SOME TIME NOW, GINO HAD FELT IT GROWING WITHIN HIM... A HATRED OF THIS LIFE, A LONGING TO ESCAPE IT. MORE AND MORE IT SEEMED THE STRINGS BOUND HIM MUCH AS THE FIGURES ON THE OTHER END...



THESE BEATINGS GREW MORE SAVAGE EACH PERFORMANCE. BUT SUCH WAS THE HARSHNESS OF THE TIMES, THAT AUDIENCES EARLY ACCEPTED THE CRUEL HUMOR...

INDEED, MANY FOUND ADDED ENJOYMENT.



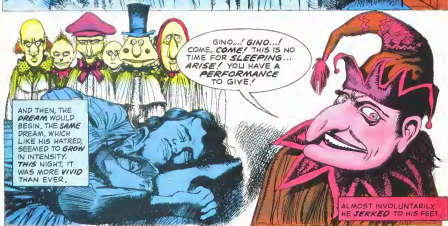


WELL, DEAR READER, AFTER THAT *PROLOGUE*, I DON'T BELIEVE WE'LL HAVE TO BEAT YOU OVER THE *HEAD* WITH THE FACT THAT THIS STORY DEALS WITH *MANNIKINS* AND THEIR *MANIPULATORS*, OR *PUPPETS* AND THE ...

PUPPET-PLAYER!



AFTER THE EVENING SHOW, GINO WOULD RETIRE TO HIS WAGON TO *REST*, TO THINK THOUGHTS OF THE DAY HE WOULD *ABANDON* THIS LIFE FOR A *BETTER* ONE... AND UNDER THE EVER-WATCHFUL GAZE OF THE PUPPETS, TO DRIFT FINALLY INTO UNEASY *SLEUMBER*.



GINO...! GINO...!
COME, COME! THIS IS NO
TIME FOR *SLEEPING*...
ARISE! YOU HAVE A
PERFORMANCE
TO GIVE!

AND THEN, THE
DREAM WOULD
BEGIN, THE *SAME*
DREAM, WHICH
LIKE HIS HATRED,
SEEMED TO *GROW*
IN INTENSITY.
THIS NIGHT, IT
WAS MORE *VIVID*
THAN EVER.

ALMOST INVOLUNTARILY
HE *JERKED* TO HIS FEET.



YOU'VE BEEN FORGETTING YOURSELF OF LATE, GINO! AND SO THESE REHEARSALS ARE NECESSARY!

STRINGS ATTACHED TO MY BODY... PULLING ME... TUGGING ME...

MOTHER OF GOD...! I'VE BECOME ONE OF MY OWN PUPPETS! I'VE-- BUT IT'S ONLY A DREAM! I MUST KEEP SAYING THAT! IT'S--



--ONLY A DREAM IF THAT GIVES YOU COMFORT, GINO... THEN BELIEVE AS YOU WILL!

BUT DO NOT THINK THAT WILL PERMIT YOU TO GET AWAY WITH ANYTHING! YOU ARE HERE TO REHEARSE!

QUITE RIGHT... AND IT'S TIME TO PUT HIM THROUGH HIS PACES! COME, GINO... MOVE!

PAIN SHOT THROUGH GINO'S BODY... SHARP PAIN FROM EVERY SPOT... WHERE A THREAD TOUCHED HIM... HE WAS AGAINST HIS WILL... HIS BODY MOVED!



IT'S INSANE! THE PUPPETS STAND FREE... AND I TAKE THEIR PLACE!

BUT WHY... WHY?! WHAT IS THE POINT? WHY CAN I NEVER REMEMBER HOW THIS DAMNABLE NIGHTMARE GOES...? WHY MUST I ALWAYS FORGET THE WAY IT ENDS?!

AGONY DROVE ALL THOUGHT FROM GINO'S MIND AS HE WAS PROPELLED FORWARD BY THE LAUGHING HORDE...

MERCY
YOU GROTESQUE
LITTLE MONSTERS...
YOU WILL TEAR ME
APART! THIS CAN-
NOT LAST FOR
ALWAYS... I WILL
AWAKE! THEN, IT
WILL BE MY TURN
TO JERK THE
STRINGS!

FOR NOW
IT IS OUR
TURN, GINO!

AND YOU DELAY
THE PERFORMANCE!
MARCH, LITTLE
PUPPET... ON TO
THE THEATER!

GINO SCREAMED AS HE WAS FORCED TO PRANCE AHEAD OF THE GIGGLING, CHIT-TERING MOB. UNTIL A SUDDEN, VIOLENT HEAVE...

...LIFTED HIM ONTO THE STAGE!

AGHHH!

P- PLEASE...
WHAT DO YOU
EXPECT ME TO DO...?
I DIDN'T MEAN
WHAT I SAID
BEFORE... I...
I...

EVEN AS HE *SPOKE*, GINO *KNEW* THE ANSWER, EVEN AS THE SNICKERING *THROG* STOOD BEFORE HIM AND SHOUTED...

YOU'RE GOING TO *PERFORM* GINO!

AS YOU MAKE *US* *PERFORM*!

FIRST THE *DANCE*.
THEN THE *SONGS*.
THEN...

...THE *CLUB*,
GINO!

BOOS AND HISSES ROSE FROM THE AUDIENCE, CUTTING OFF HIS *WORDS*! THEIR MOCKING TONES STARTED TO *BECOME RAGE*...

THE...
C-CLUB...?

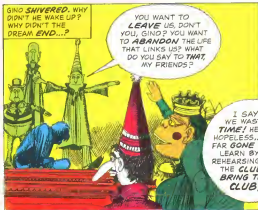
THINK WE DON'T HATE
WHAT *WE* DO, GINO?

PLEASE...
NO...! IT'S
ONLY THAT
I'VE COME TO
HATE WHAT
I DO SO
MUCH THAT
MAKES ME...

PERFORM!

NO... NO...!
I WON'T DO IT!
I'M A *MAN*... NOT
SOME *PERFORMING*
THING LIKE THE
LOT OF YOU!
I WON'T!

DO YOU *HEAR*?
HE THINKS HE CAN
DEFY US...? THIS
HAS GONE TOO FAR!
FORGET THE
DANCES, THE SONGS...
**BRING THE
CLUB!**



AND A NEW ONE SCRAMBLED UPON THE STAGE. THE ONE GINO HAD MADE SUFFER MOST... PUNCHINELLO!

DO NOT DESPAIR, GINO. THOUGH USUALLY ON THE RECEIVING END... I ASSURE YOU I SHALL WEILD THIS MOST CREDIBLY!



SOME TIME LATER, IT WAS MOST **QUIET** IN THE PUPPET-PLAYER'S WAGON. GINO MALASPINA LAY SPRAWLED AWKWARDLY ON HIS BED **BLOOD** FROM HIS BATTERED HEAD DRYING, TURNING THICK AND DARK...

THEY WOULD HAVE TO START **CLEANING** HIM SOON, PUNCHINELLO THOUGHT, BUT WITH SOME MAKE-UP OVER THE WOUNDS, THE BODY WOULD CERTAINLY BE FIT TO **USE** YET ANOTHER TIME, ONCE THEY CAST THE **SPELL** BRINGING IT TO LIFE AGAIN.

IT WAS A **SHAME** THAT THE SPELLS **FADED** QUICKER EACH TIME, ALLOWING THE HUMAN TO GRADUALLY BECOME **AWARE**... STILL, THIS WAS EASIER THAN CONSTANTLY BREAKING IN A **NEW ONE** TO PLAY PUPPET-MASTER.



AH, WELL! PERHAPS SOON WE **GNOMES** WILL HAVE ATTAINED SUFFICIENT NUMBERS TO AGAIN ASSUME **DOMINATION** IN THIS WORLD... AND THESE SILLY **CHARADES** WILL NOT BE **NECESSARY!**

MEANTIME, GINO, I HOPE YOU DO NOT SO **SWIFTLY** FORGET OUR LITTLE PLAY'S **MORAL**... THAT IT IS **WE** WHO TRULY "HOLD THE CLUB!"



ALIEN WINGS BEAT **FORBODINGLY** UPON
VIOLENT WINDS **THIS** NIGHT.



HEAVEN AND EARTH
TREMBLE...



...AS **GODS**
AWAKEN...



...IN MALEVOLENT **SPLendor**.

DAX^{the} DAMNED

LONG HAVE I KNOWN MY LIFE IS **CURSED**
BY THE GODS, DAX IS NO MORE THAN A
TORMENTED PLAYTHING, SOMETHING TO BE
PROVOKED, USED. **DAMNED** AM I BY NATURE OF
MY LIFE. A WARRIOR BEARS HIS SWORD ONLY
WHERE THE GODS STEER HIS PATH. I AM A
WARRIOR. NOTHING MORE THAN A **PAWN** UPON
SOME SUPERNATURAL BOARD, IN A TIMELESS GAME OF...

CHESS

ART: ESTEBAN MAROTO / COLOR: BILL DuBAY

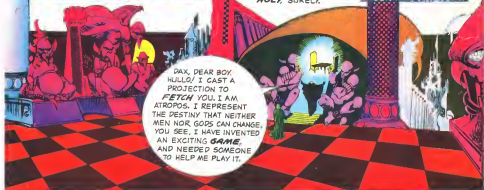


AN IDLE GOD FILLED
WITH TORMENT, BENT
LOW ACROSS THE EARTH
AND FOUND HIS **PAWN**,
AND DAX WAS DRAWN
THROUGH THE **NETHER**.

FALLING BEYOND
ENDLESSNESS, MY
STRAINED EYES SAW
THAT WHICH WAS
NEITHER PROPHET
NOR SEER, NOR
DREAMER NOR
HADMAN HAS
DARED TO BEHOLD,



MY DESCENT SLOWED
AND GENTLY TOUCHED
THE FLINT, AND **LO!**
DAX WAS WITHIN THE
HALLS OF THE MOST
HOLY, SURELY.



DAX, DEAR BOY,
HULLO! I CAST A
PROJECTION TO
FETCH YOU. I AM
ATROPOS. I REPRESENT
THE DESTINY THAT NEITHER
MEN NOR GODS CAN CHANGE.
YOU SEE, I HAVE INVENTED
AN EXCITING **GAME**,
AND NEEDED SOMEONE
TO HELP ME PLAY IT.



I'M A
GAMESTER. A
GAMBLER SUPREME.
I WAGER AND PLAY
ANYTHING AND ALL.
AND I HAVE A GAME
OF **DEATH** AND
LIFE TO PLAY.



I'M NO GAMESTER, LORD.
ONLY A **SWORDMAN**.
A WARRIOR, I PLAY **NOT**.
WHY CHOOSE **ME?**



I CHOOSE **YOU**
BECAUSE YOU ARE **ALREADY**
MARKED BY THE GODS FOR
TORMENT. I'M A LESSER
LORD HERE, AND MAY ONLY
USE THOSE **ALREADY**
DAMED.



I KNOW THE GREAT
LORDS USE YOU FREELY
LIKE A PAWN OF CHESS.
I **PITY** YOU. THEREFORE,
I GIVE THE CHANCE TO
BE AS ONE OF YOUR
TORMENTORS...



...TO BE AS
A **GOD!**



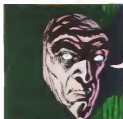
IN **THIS** GAME DAX
WILL HOLD THE VERY
POWER OF LIFE...
AND DEATH IN HIS
HAND.



NEVER BEFORE HAD I
REFUSED A **CHALLENGE**.
BUT NOW...



YOU **KNOW** THE TASTE OF
BEING BUT A CHESSPIECE AS
BITTER. NOW TASTE THE
LUXURY OF BEING A **PLAYER**.
A **GOD!** YOUR CHESSPIECES
ASSEMBLE. EVEN NOW.
BEHOLD!



YOU MAY HAVE EACH ONE BACK IN LIFE IF YOU *WIN* MY GAME.



YET WITH EACH MOVE
YOU LOSE, ONE WILL **DIE**
AGAIN, UNTIL ALL ARE BACK
WITHIN THE WRETCHED WALLS
OF **DEATH**. THEY ARE **TRULY**
ALIVE NOW, BUT ARE MUTE
PUPPETS TILL GAME'S END.
IF **ANY** LET THEM LIVE
THEN,



AND LOOK DAX!
THE BLACKS! *MY*
FIGURE PIECES! *THEY*
ARE AT *MY*
COMMAND! I BELIEVE
WE ARE READY.
LET US BEGIN.

IN THE EYE OF LEERING
DESTINY WE SAT TO *PLAY*



WHAT SPORT COULD I HAVE BEEN? A CHESSPIECE IN MY HAND RATHER THAN A SWORD, A SINGLE MOVE.
A MORTAL COMBAT.

WITH EACH MOVE UPON THE BOARD, THE
LIVING CHESSMEN EMULATE. I LIFTED
MY FIGURE, RONIUS, A COUSIN SLAIN,
STIRRED TO LIFE. ATROPOS COUNTERED
A DEMON RUSHED AT RONIUS.



A MOVE! WRONG!...

RONIUS DIED. SCREAMING.



FORFEIT
ONE PIECE,
DAX, ONE LIFE.



WHUMP!



THERE WAS BUT ONE WHITE PIECE LEFT. MY FATHER. MY SWORD TREMBLED TOWARD MY HAND.

AND FINALLY...CHECKMATE... WITH THE QUEEN, TO BE MATE ON THE SECOND MOVE. SAY A VERY QUICK FAREWELL TO YOUR FATHER. QUICK NOW!

NO POWER BUT TO **SLAY**, TO **KILL**.
AND KILLING IS THE **ONLY** THING
TANGIBLE HERE. THE **ONLY** CAUSE
WORTH PURSUING. YET I NEEDED
NOT TO HAVE TRAVELED TO
HEAVEN TO KILL. I AM NO
GAMESTER. I AM A **KILLER**.

LET HIM
LIVE!

THIS IS THE DIFFERENCE
IN GODS AND MEN! I
UNDERSTAND! GODS
LIVE TO **KILL**... MEN
KILL TO **LIVE**.

FOOLISHLY
SIMPLE.
THANK YOU DAX!
NOW **BEGONE!**

BRACCOO!

IMMMNNNN!!!

AND THE GAMESTER GOD THREW THE
FISH **BACK** INTO THE POND. FOR THERE
WERE **OTHER** FISHERS WAITING TO
NET IT. A FEVERISH DREAM HAD IT
ALL BEEN.

AND DREAM IT **MIGHT** HAVE
BEEN, BUT CRUELLY THEY WOULD
NOT EVEN GIVE ME THE HOPE IT
WAS A DREAM. FOR I WAS SENT
ALONG A GRIM **REMINDER** OF A
BITTER GAME OF CHESS.

'TIS ALL A CHEQUER-BOARD OF NIGHTS AND DAYS
WHERE DESTINY WITH MEN FOR PIECES PLAYS:
HITHER AND THITHER MOVES, AND MATES AND SLAYS,
AND ONE BY ONE IN THE CLOSET LAYS."

RUBAIYAT OF OMAR KHAYAM

FOR ME, **SEX** WAS A CONSCIOUSLY DEVELOPED **ART...** A CANVAS OF TACTILE **SENSATIONS** TO BE ADORNED WITH SENSUOUS TEXTURES AND REFINED **TECHNIQUES.**

THE **OTHER** SPACERS SAID I WAS TOO **CALCULATING** ABOUT IT... TOO **RITUALISTIC** TO EVER TRULY FEEL THE **SPONTANEOUS ECSTASY OF LOVE.**

BUT THOSE **JOKERS** WERE JUST **JEALOUS.** I FELT **PLENTY...** AND SO DID THE **CHICKS** WHO WERE NEVER CONTENT WITH JUST **ONE NIGHT** WITH ME. THEY USUALLY **PESTERED** MY ANSWERING SERVICE FOR **YEARS.**

BUT **ONE NIGHT** PER WOMAN WAS STRICTLY MY **LIMIT...** AND **WOULD** BE UNTIL I COMPLETED A LITTLE **PERSONAL GUEST.**

THE **GUEST** WAS FINDING A WOMAN WHO COULD **SATISFY** ME FOR ALL THE **REST** OF MY NIGHTS TO **DEATH.**

WHICH WAS WHY I **FLOWED** A TUNNEL THROUGH SPACE LEADING STRAIGHT TO **ECOYSIA,** WITHIN 30 MINUTES OF **FIRST** HEARING THE **RUMORS** ABOUT IT!

WHICH WAS DEFINITELY A **MISTAKE!**

I **SHOULD'VE** TAKEN THE TWO HOURS REQUIRED FOR A COMPUTER INSPECTION OF THE SHIP'S OPERATIONAL SYSTEMS. BUT I **DIDN'T!**

SO I **CRASHED,** LIKE A MOUNTAIN-SIZED METEOR ON **JUPITER...**

MATES.

STORY: DOUGH MOENCH / ART: ESTEBAN MAROTO

WHEN THE RETRO-THRUSTS REFUSED TO RESPOND, I'D HAD PLENTY OF TIME TO INFLATE THE BUSTER-CUSHIONS... WHICH MEANT I'D SURVIVE, EVEN IF THE SHIP WOULDN'T.

BUT IF JUST HALF OF WHAT THEY SAID ABOUT ECDYSIA WAS TRUE, I WOULDN'T EVEN BE WANTING THE SHIP TO TAKE ME BACK HOME...

LEAST YOU GOT ME HERE, NELLIE...

THE STORY WAS... ECDYSIA WAS OBSCURE BY VIRTUE OF REMOTE LOCATION *ONLY*. ITS ECOLOGY WAS SYMPATHETIC TO HUMANOID LIFE. THEREFORE, HUMANOID *FLOURISHED*... A PLANETFUL OF THEM! ALL CHICKS...

...PLUS A GROWING NUMBER OF SPACERS WHO'D BEEN IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME, AND HAD HEARD OF THE PLEASURE-PLANET.

JUNGLE'S EXOTIC ENOUGH... HOW TO FIND SOME FEMALE-TYPES AND SEE IF THEY SHARE THE ATTRIBUTE.

LIKE I SAID, I APPROACH *SEX* THE WAY A MUSICIAN TREATS HIS INSTRUMENT... ALWAYS TRYING SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING BETTER.

I'VE SKIMMED THE CREAM OFF A CROP OF CHICKS FROM NEARLY EVERY PLANET AND CULTURE IN THE GALACTIC FEDERATION. YOU LEARN A LOT OF TRICKS THAT WAY...

...AND YOU ALSO LEARN TO BECOME JADED... *BORED*. THAT'S WHY I HELD SUCH GRANDIOSE HOPES FOR ECDYSIA AND ITS PLANET-SPANNING HAREM!

COULDN'T HAVE BEEN THAT MUCH OFF-COURSE... THE CITY'S SUPPOSED TO BE ON THE SAME COORDINATES AS MY CRASH-DOWN.

I MEAN, AFTER ALL, IF NOT ONE OF THE SPACERS WHO'VE JOURNEYED TO ECDYSIA HAS BOTHERED TO RETURN...

...THE NATIVES MUST BE PRETTY CONVINCING ARGUMENTS FOR ESTABLISHING PERMANENT RESIDENCE.

THEY SAID I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO MISS IT... ONCE I CAME WITHIN SIGHT OF IT..!

FIVE MINUTES INTO THE TANGLED-UNDERBRUSH SCENE, I BEGAN FORMULATING A DIFFERENT THEORY FOR THE FAILURE OF THOSE SPACERS TO RETURN.

AND IT WAS THE UGLIEST THEORY I'D EVER SEEN.

24-18!

BUT I REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO BELIEVE THAT ALL THOSE LUST-CRAZED SPACERS HAD BEEN PREVENTED FROM LEAVING EODYSIA...

...SO I DECIDED TO PROVE FOR MYSELF THAT A SPACER EQUIPPED WITH STANDARD GEAR COULD AVOID ANY POTENTIAL PREVENTION.

"STANDARD GEAR" BEING A LASER-SLASHER...

A MAN COULD REALLY GET OFF WITH A LASER-SLASHER! PROBABLY BECAUSE IT WAS VAGUELY FASHIONED... AND FUNCTIONABLE... AS A SWORD, EVOKING THE ATAVISTIC THRILL OF BASIC COMBAT..!

OF COURSE, THE FACT THAT EACH THRUST OR SLASH MET WITH A BURST OF CRACKLING SPARKS, SEARED FLESH, AND ERUPTING GORE HELPED A LITTLE...



I SLASHED...

...LEAVING THE LASER TO DO THE REST.

AH-AH, HANDSOME... MUSTN'T TOUCH THE MAGIC WAND.



...HELPED IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE!

THE SIZZLING CARCASS REEKED... MAKING ME ANXIOUS TO FORGE AHEAD...

...TOWARD THE FABULOUS RACE OF CHICKS WHO HAD DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE ARTFUL GROOMING OF SEX. DEFINITELY MY KIND OF CHICKS...



THE JUNGLE THICKENED WITH EACH STEP... SO I THINNED IT BY CONVERTING MY SLASHER TO A MACHETE... WHICH WAS EASIER ON MY SHOULDER THAN THE GENUINE ARTICLE WOULD'VE BEEN.



EVEN SO, THERE WAS NOTHING TO ALLEVIATE THE FATIGUE CRAMPING MY FEET.



THAT WAS A LOT OF DENSE FOLIAGE I TRUDGED THROUGH...

...AND JUST AS I BEGAN TO DESPAIR OVER EVER LOCATING THE FABLED SIN-CITY...



...I STUCK A CARELESS FOOT IN SOMEBODY'S MOUTH...



...AND IT WAS A PRETTY STRONG BITE...

A SNARE AS OLD AS THE BRONZE AGE ON MY HOME WORLD.

...WHICH ACTIVATED



IN BASIC, APPRENTICE SPACERS ARE TAUGHT THAT YOGA MANEUVERS WHICH FORCE BLOOD TO THE HEAD PROVIDE BENEFICIAL REWARDS...



BUT AS I CAUGHT INVERTED SIGHT OF THE SNARE'S MAINTENANCE CREW, I WISHED MY INSTRUCTORS HAD MENTIONED SOMETHING ABOUT THE EXCEPTION TO THE RULE.



...WHERE I RACKED MY WAY
THROUGH TWO MORE OF THE
MONSTERS!

THAT'S
NO WAY
TO TREAT A
LADY,
UGLY...



SHE WAS DEAD...
**BEATEN TO
DEATH!**

BUT **BEAUTIFUL**
THROUGH THE
BRUISES...AND THE
FIRST TANGIBLE
EVIDENCE THAT
I WASN'T STRANDED
ON AN ALIEN
PLANET WITH
NOTHING BUT **PUG**
-UGLIES FOR
COMPANY.



I FINALLY SAW THE
CITY FROM THE CREST
OF THE **NEXT HILL.**



...AND LOST NO TIME IN
HEADING FOR A **CLOSER**
VIEW!



BUT IT SEEMED THE MAJESTIC CITY OF PLEASURES WAS
EQUIPPED WITH A TEAM OF ALERT **CENSORS**...
BENT ON **ECLIPSING**
MY PROSPECTIVE
INVESTIGATION.



IT **MIGHT'VE** BEEN A LANGUAGE,
BUT I TOOK IT AS MORE ALONG THE
LINES OF FIERCE **BELLOWING.**

I GORE-BLASTED A FEW OF THEM...



...BUT IT DIDN'T TAKE A GENIUS TO SEE
THAT I'D **NEVER** SEAR THEM **ALL**
BEFORE I WAS SWAMPED TO THE
GILLS IN MURDEROUS **MONSTER**
MUSCLE.

...WHICH ONLY MADE THE ABRUPT ARRIVAL OF SEVERAL STREAKING ARROWS A VERY WELCOME SIGHT!



THE SURVIVING ISSUES TOOK OFF AT A HECTIC GALLOP...

...FOLLOWED BY A LAST GRACEFUL VOLLEY OF ARROWS FROM MY DECIDEDLY FEMININE SAVORS.



WITHOUT A WORD, THEY ESCORTED ME INTO THE MARVELOUS CITY! EACH OF THEM WAS MORE BEAUTIFUL AND SEDUCTIVE THAN THE OTHER...

...EVEN IF YOU WENT BACK FOR A SECOND LOOK AT THE OTHER! ALL OF WHICH MEANT THAT I'D HAVE PREFERRED ANY ONE OF THEM AT ANY GIVEN TIME! LUST FOR EVERY MOOD AND OCCASION...

TAKING ME TO YOUR LEADER, EH? SUITS ME FINE...JUST AS LONG AS I GET TO UNSUIT AS SOON AS WE GET THERE.



THEY USHERED ME INTO ONE OF THOSE LAVISHLY-APPOINTED CHAMBERS YOU ALWAYS HEAR ABOUT...POTTED PLANTS, WALL-TO-WALL MIRRORS, THE WHOLE BIT...



...AND THEN, SCORNING PRELIMINARIES, BEGAN STRIPPING ME. I WAS, SHALL WE SAY... COOPERATIVE...?

THEY GAVE ME THE ROYAL TREATMENT! BATHING ME, FEEDING ME...AND FINALLY TUCKING ME INTO THE BIGGEST, MOST LAVISH HEATER-BED EVER...!



I HAD EXPECTED... WELL, WITH ALL THOSE WOMEN AROUND, AND NO MEN... I HAD EXPECTED MORE!



BUT I MUST ADMIT... I WAS A LITTLE UNWARY WHEN THEY BEGAN TO LEAVE ME ALONE FOR THE NIGHT...!

BUT I DIDN'T HAVE TO LIE IN THAT **LOVELY ROOM** FOR **LONG!**

MY FIRST 'VISITOR' SLIPPED IN AS SWEETLY AND COITLY AS ANY YOUNG WOMAN, ANXIOUS TO TRY SOMETHING NEW...



AND MY SECOND AND THIRD HOUSEGUESTS FOLLOWED NOT LONG AFTER...

I GUESS I'D HAVE TO SAY IT WAS THE START OF A NIGHT TO REMEMBER.



MY FORMER BOREDOM WITH THE SUNDRY PERMUTATIONS OF SEX WAS DISPELLED... I THOUGHT OF MY SPACESHIP AN IRREPARABLY TWISTED DERELICT PROBABLY ALREADY ENGULFED BY THE FERTILE JUNGLE, AND I SMIRKED. WHERE COULD I GO AFTER THIS? THEN I LAUGHED...

...AND SO DID MY PARTNERS-IN-CARNAL-WONDER THEY LAUGHED LONG AND SUGGESTIVELY!



...LAUGHTER WHICH PERSISTED THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT AND WHICH WAS LEFT BEHIND AS THEY FILED FROM THE CHAMBER... LEAVING ME SATIATED AND ALONE

IN THE MORNING I KNEW WHY NONE OF THE SPACERS HAD RETURNED FROM ECDYSIA! AND WHY I WOULD NEVER LEAVE... I DRESSED, NOTICING THE ABSENCE OF MY LASER-SLASHER... AND KNEW I'D NEVER GET IT BACK.



THE CHICKS, I SURMISED, MUST HAVE ENVELOPED THE PLANET WITH SOME SORT OF INTERFERENCE FIELD WHICH CAUSES EVERY APPROACHING SHIP TO DISFUNCTION AND CRASH! AND MAYBE THE WEIRD PURPLE MIST TURNED THEM INTO VECTORS... CARRIERS... OF THE DISEASE!

THE SPACERS HAD TRIED TO WARN ME... TRIED TO STOP ME... JUST AS THEY MUST HAVE BEEN WARNED BY THE SPACERS BEFORE THEM! I REPAID THEIR CONCERN WITH MURDER... JUST AS THEY'D PROBABLY MURDERED TO REACH THE CITY AND ITS MADLY ALLURING SEX-OBJECTS!



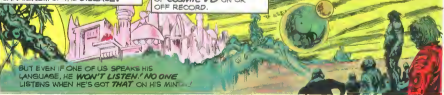
WE ALL LEARN, SOONER OR LATER! TOO BAD THE OBJECT LESSON HAD TO BE THE MOST NIGHTMARISH CASE OF COSMIC VD ON OR OFF RECORD.

TO MY DEEP SLEEP.

SO I'VE HAD MY NIGHT OF UNBOUNDED ECSTASY AND LUST... AND NOW THEY'RE FORCING ME TO LEAVE.



I GUESS I'LL JOIN THE OTHER SPACERS... THE ONES WHO WEREN'T KILLED... AND WE'LL TRY TO WARN THE NEXT FOOL!



BUT EVEN IF ONE OF US SPEAKS HIS LANGUAGE, HE WON'T LISTEN! NO ONE LISTENS WHEN HE'S GOT THAT ON HIS MIND!

PROLOGUE

SEE THE PAINTED SLOPPY CLOWN...AND **LAUGH!** OH WHAT JOYOUS BOFFOLA...!



BUT YOUR RAUCOUS SHRIEKS WILL ONLY **BOUNCE OFF** EVERY POLKA-DOTTED TARGET OF THE FOOL'S PRISON SUIT... AND SLAM BACK IN YOUR EARS LIKE A DUNGEON DOOR SHUTTING FOR GOOD...

HOW FUNNY THIS LAUGH-SOPPER LOOKS WITH HIS FLAPPY FEET RUNNING...!

GOT TO RUN FOR MY LIFE EVERY YEAR... FROM 1984 TO 2001...!

GOT TO GET RID OF THESE RIDICULOUS SHOES! CAN'T MOVE IN THEM...!

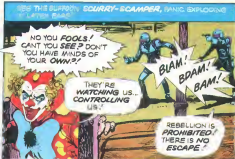


WHAT? NO MORE SLAP-FLAPPY OFFERDS TO PROVOKE THOSE UPDRAIRIOUS BELLY-BOOMS?



...SO THEY CAN GET LOADED TO SHOOT THE TELLER TO BUY THE BEANS TO GO TO THE CELL ON A FULL STOWAWH! AND THEN **BREAK OUT** TO DO IT ALL AGAIN...!

SIREN-SNAPPY NO MORE **LAUGHTY!** THE ICE BLUE SUITS SWOOP IN FOR THE **KILL...**



THROUGH THE SWINGST DOORS STRAIGHT TO MADNESS...!



OUTER SPACE...? NO, NOT AGAIN...!

IT CHANGES... KEEPS CHANGING AT REGULAR INTERVALS...!

I'M TRAPPED... IN THIS... THIS INSANITY!

YOU SAY YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING, SHRIEK-CREEPS? WELL, ALL THE FUZZIES WILL BE CLEARED UP... IF YOU JUST STAY TUNED!



BLACK AND WHITE VACUUM TO BLUES

WATCH THE FLOTSAM FUNMAKER, FOLLOWED BY HIS FEROCIOUS **FOES...**

...INTO THE GIGGLY-SILENT **STARDUST...** THROUGH NO **AIR AT ALL...**

WHAT'S WORSE...?
**COPS OR GALACTIC
MARAUDERS?** THEY'RE
ALL CONTROLLED BY THE
**SAME DIABOLICAL
MASTERMIND!**

A GREAT SUCKY **INTAKE** AND THE
JESTER OF THE **SPACE NAVES**
BECOMES LIKE UNTO A **WET
NOODLE...** SLURPED MAMA M/A
TOWARD THE SPACESHIP'S HUNGRY
MOUTH

THE
SPACERS'VE
GOT ME... CAUGHT
ME IN A **SUCTION
VORTEX!**

...DOWN-THUMPED ON A SOFT SPOT
IN A STARBURST OF **PAIN..!**

OUCH!

NOBODY
HERE...?

MAYBE THIS
DOOR LEADS TO
THE **CONTROL
ROOM!** MAYBE I
CAN USE THIS SHIP
AS A VEHICLE FOR
ESCAPE!

SEE THE MIRTHY CREATOR OF JOLLITY SO FUNNY-STUNNED AS HE OPENS THE
PLASTISTEEL SPACESHIP **PORTAL...**

NOT AGAIN!
I'VE LIVED THIS
BEFORE... OVER
AND OVER, THE
SAME THINGS!

UGH! HERE
IS **CLOWN!** CLOWN
MUST UNDERGO
HEAP BIG **TRIAL!**

LOOKY! THE CLOWN WAVES ON CHILL-BARE FEET, PREFERRING AN EMPTY **SPACE CRUISER** TO A PLANE FULL OF **SCALP-SEEKERS**...

THEN AGAIN, SWARM-SLEWS OF **SCALP-SEEKERS** SEEM MORE DESIRABLE THAN BLUEMEN WITH BLASTING BLAZERS...!

...BUT...

JIGGERS... THE COPS!

WHY DID I SAY THAT? I WAS FORCED TO SAY THAT!



SLAMMM
BLAM! BAM!

THERE HE GOES, O'CASEY! **GET HIM!**

HOKAY, CLOWN. YOU KNOW RULES, THIS IS LAND OF **PREDESTINY**... NO **FREE WILL!** EVERYTHING **PROGRAMMED** FOR US! NO CAN BREAK **ORDER**...!

BUT YOU CAN'T DO THIS! WE SHARE A **COMMON ADVERSARY!** WE SHOULD **UNITE** TO BREAK FREE OF THE **BIG BROTHER** WHO'S **WATCHING** US... WHO KEEPS US UNDER **CONSTANT SURVEILLANCE!**

STOP **FUCKING FORKED TONGUE, WHITEFACE!** YOU WASTE **TIME!** WE ONLY ALLOTTED CERTAIN AMOUNT OF **TWE...** MUST ACCOMPLISH **PRESCRIBED PURPOSE** THEREIN! NO **REBELS** ARE ALLOWED!



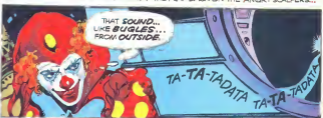
MAYBE I CAN **CONFUSE 'EM** BY **LIFTING THE BACK FLAP** AND **ESCAPING!**

BUT **FATE** HAS A GIGGLE OR SO UP ITS **TENT-FLAP** FOR OUR **FUGITIVE FOOL** FROM THE **VAST GALACTIC DUST CLUSTER**...



THE **SPACESHIP** AGAIN! THE **MISERABLE FIENDS** ARE **TOYING** WITH ME... PROBABLY **MONITORING** ME **RIGHT NOW** AND HAVING A **GOOD LAUGH** ABOUT IT TO **BOOT!**

FRANTIC HANDS CH 50 FUMBLY-**SLAP** THE **FLAP** BACK ON THE **ANGRY SCALPERS**...



THAT **SOUND**... LIKE **BUGLES**... FROM **OUTSIDE**.

TA-TA-TADATA TA-TA-TADATA

THE **TEEPES**... IF I CAN **DASH INTO** IT...



THE CLOWN IS **DOWN**...IN A DARK-DARK, CREEPY-CRAWLY, DISMAL - DREARY CASTLE...

OH NO... NOT THIS ONE AGAIN. I'VE BEEN IN THIS ONE SO MANY TIMES!

LISTEN TO THE CREAKITY-CRUSTED CASKET CRACK OPEN FROM *WITHIN*...

NOW HE'S GOING TO POP UP... **DRAMATICALLY**... RIGHT ON **CUE**... AND SAY--

KREEEEEEEEK-K-K-K...

GOOD EVE-EN-INGS...

LISTEN, VAMPIRE, I KNOW YOU'RE OUT TO GET ME... JUST LIKE ALL THE REST! BUT **WAKE UP** AND **LISTEN** TO ME!

THEY'RE **WATCHING** US! CAN'T YOU **FEEL** THEIR EYES ON YOU EVEN **NOW**? THEY **MADE** YOU A **VAMPIRE**!

WE WERE **ALL** BORN IN 1947, MY DEAR CLOWN. I'VE ALL UNDERGONE **RATINGS**, AND HAVE BEEN ASSIGNED TO OUR INDIVIDUAL, **SPECIALIZED ROLES**..!

YOU ARE **PARANOID**... SUFFERING FROM AN ACUTE **PERSECUTION COMPLEX**! AND NOW I SHALL **JUSTIFY** THAT COMPLEX!

I WANT YOUR **BLOOD** BECAUSE THE **BLOOD** IS THE **LIFE**...

...AND BECAUSE I AM **THIRSTY**!

YOU...YOU HAVE **NO MIND** OF YOUR OWN. YOU'RE A **PARROT**, LIKE ALL THE OTHERS... SPEAKING LINES **THEY WANT** YOU TO SPEAK..!

YOU WANT MY **BLOOD** BECAUSE I'M **IMMORTAL**...!

BUT DON'T YOU SEE THAT OUR LIFE IS JUST A **STAGE**... AND IT'S **WRITTEN** THAT YOU WANT MY **BLOOD**... ?!

HEFTER-SKELTER, HECTIC LESS
JOGGLE-BOG THE CLOWNIE DOWN
THE STONE STAIRWELL! DRAC-
FLAK HARD TO HACK?



NO USE
TRYING TO *REASON*
WITH HIM! HE'S
BRAINWASHED LIKE
ALL THE REST!

GOT TO
RUN FOR MY
LIFE...!



NO! IT CAN'T BE
CURTAINS FOR
ME!

I DIDN'T DO
IT! I'M *INNOCENT*!
THE MAN WITH THE
HOOK... IN
CASABLANCA--!

THEN THE GREAT VELVETY
CURTAINS START TO *PART*!
AND THE FOOLISH CLOWN
REALIZES THAT HIS *TIME* HAS
RUN OUT! HE HAS RUN AND
RUN AND RERUN... AND NOW
ALL HIS OPTIONS ARE
CANCELLED..!



TRAPPED
BETWEEN THE
SHADOWS IN
FRONT OF ME AND
THE *VAMPIRE*
BEHIND ME!



YOU'VE FLED
ACROSS THE VAST
WASTELAND LONG
ENOUGH, VAMPIRE!
YOUR SHOW'S
OVER, CLOWN!

BUT I'M
NOT A CLOWN...
NOT REALLY!



I'M A *MAN*
UNDERNEATH THIS
CLOWNSUIT! DO
YOU *HEAR*? I'M
A *MAN* WITH HIS
OWN IDENTITY!

THAT'S ENOUGH,
AWOL Z38! YOU NEVER
SHOULD'VE LEFT YOUR
SET!

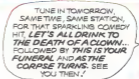
BUT WE GOT YA NOW
AND WE AIN'T EVEN GONNA
BOTHER *BOOKIN'* YA...
DUE YA CIRCUMSTANCES
BEYOND OUR CONTROL!



I'M A *MAN*,
I TELL YOU! THE
CLOWN IS JUST
GREASEPAINT... AND
I *REFUSE* TO WEAR
IT ANYMORE!

I WON'T
WAGGLERADE AS
AN *IDIOT* MOUTHING
INANE PHRASES FOR
THE AMUSEMENT OF
CRETINS WHO CAN'T
THINK FOR
THEMSELVES!

UGH! HEAP
BIG *BERSERKER*
THIS ONE... *DISRUPTING*
PROGRAMMING BEST
SUITED TO *MASSSES*!



BEA! CORBEN! FERNANDEZ! JONES! MAROTO!

FINE ARTISTS IN A GREAT COMIX INTERNATIONAL No. 3!

According to Spanish artist, Jose Bea, good comics should be more than simpleminded sludge to appease infantile appetites. He views comics as a developing art form, separate in many ways from fine art, but just as viable. His work is important. Through it he reaches a vast and varied audience... a far greater number of people than the select group who would view his work from someone's livingroom wall. And he feels that communication and entertainment is what art... and comics... is all about!



Rich Corben is a gentle, affable man who spends most of his time at his drawing board. His quiet exterior hides a dynamic soul of incredible talent and perseverance. His work has successfully survived its transition from major "underground" art to mainstream comics... and has arrived integrity intact. He is an artist of mixed media and incredible facility. His stunning ability to distort realism and thereby create a more believable reality, has resulted in some of the most dramatic stories to appear in Warren magazines.



Fernando Fernandez has written: "Any artist's life is his art. Facts, dates and numbers tell you nothing. A man's art is where he feels. He is driven... seeking the self he does not understand." Fernandez seeks his identity and finds it in many beautiful and illustrative tales. For happily, his search now encompasses Warren's American magazines, as well as those of his native Spain. He has a ready audience, eager to travel on any safari Fernandez chooses to lead. For in his art we each find our own reflection!



Jeff Jones is a native Georgian, whose voice retains the soft accent of his native south. He is reserved, articulate, intensely involved in his work. His accomplishments are extensive. His illustrations have appeared in magazines, on record and book jackets. His paintings and lithography are displayed in fine art galleries. He is a sculptor. And he has written for a major science fiction magazine. But say "Jeff Jones" and one image invariably comes to mind... his sensuous, scantily-clad comic strip women!

Esteban Maroto learned to draw by looking at comics. He has read them all his life. And he believes that comics should not be the exclusive property of any one age group. Like films, comics are a visual medium. If approached correctly, they can appeal to everyone. Maroto is working to present a sophisticated image in a medium which, with some notable exceptions, has been consigned scornfully to the realm of children's entertainment. Maroto believes in the potential of comics as entertainment... for everyone!



DON'T MISS AN ISSUE



OF WARREN'S FEARSOME FOURSOME!